

Religion, Irreligion, and the Difference Place Makes: The Case of the Postwar Pacific Northwest

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British Columbia and Washington State together constituted the least religious region in North America during the postwar era. Scholars have searched in vain for a demographic explanation for this secularism. Evidence from a wide range of printed materials, quantitative sources, and oral interviews would indicate that secularism was less a demographic than a cultural phenomenon, produced and sustained in the myths, narratives, and everyday assumptions about the “authentic” Pacific Northwest. Although it was neither stable nor essential, secularism came to be seen, in the years following the Second World War, as a typical, even inevitable characteristic of the Northwest. Secularism, together with class and gender, was central to the invention of a distinctive, cross-border regional identity.

La Colombie-Britannique et l'État de Washington formaient ensemble la région la moins religieuse d'Amérique du Nord durant l'époque d'après-guerre. Les lettrés ont cherché en vain une explication démographique à ce sécularisme. Les données colligées d'une foule de documents imprimés, de sources quantitative et d'entrevues orales semblent indiquer que le sécularisme était un phénomène moins démographique que culturel, produit et entretenu dans les mythes, les récits et les présomptions de tous les jours quant à l'« authentique » Nord-Ouest Pacifique. Bien que le sécularisme ne fût ni stable ni essentiel, on en est vu à le considérer, durant les années qui ont suivi la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, comme une caractéristique typique, voire inévitable, du Nord-Ouest. Le sécularisme, avec la classe et le genre, a joué un rôle capital dans l'invention d'une identité régionale transfrontalière à nulle autre pareille.

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A DAILY NEWSPAPER in Victoria, British Columbia, on May 14, 2003, carried the startling headline: “1.3 million in BC profess no religion.” Drawing on recently released data from the 2001 census, the author noted that 35 per cent of British Columbians claimed to have no religion, compared to only 16 per cent of Canadians generally. The article revealed that British Columbia was the only province in Canada where having no religion was the “number one religion.”¹ The release of figures from a 2001 American survey provoked similar comments in newspapers south of the border. The survey results prompted one Seattle reporter to write, “It’s Sunday morning in the state that leads the nation in a soul-shaking statistic: the highest percentage of people who say they have no religion.” Washington residents learned that 25 per cent of their state’s population claimed no religion, compared to 14 per cent of the wider United States population.² While some readers may have found such statistics surprising, references to the unusually non-religious character of the Pacific Northwest were certainly not new. In 2001, the proportion of people in both countries professing no religion was larger than ever before, but the distinct secularity of the Northwest relative to both nations has remained constant since the nineteenth century.

The constancy of this regional secularism became especially apparent in the religiously turbulent postwar decades. Across North America, a dramatic rise in measurable religious involvement during the 1950s was met by an equally sharp decline in the 1960s. In the mid-1960s, Canadians and Americans encountered new secular impulses, as *Time* magazine famously wondered about the death of God and authors such as Pierre Berton railed about the self-satisfied, undemanding, “comfortable pews” of the Christian churches.³ By the early 1970s, more people than ever before were claiming to have no religion, and rates of participation in churches and other religious institutions had fallen well below the levels existing before the Second World War. While the Pacific Northwest shared in these broader religious trends, the secularity of the region

1 *Times Colonist*, May 14, 2003, p. A1. Also see *Vancouver Sun*, May 14, 2003, p. A1.

2 *USA Today*, March 6, 2002, <http://www.usatoday.com/life/2002/2002-03-07-church-free.htm>. Also see *Seattle Times*, October 11, 2005, http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/opinion/2002552768_harrop11.html; *Seattle Weekly*, March 24, 2004, p. 9; *Times Colonist*, May 14, 2003, pp. A1–A2.

3 Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at Christianity and the Religious Establishment in the New Age* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1965); *Time*, April 8, 1966. Also see John Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). For postwar discussions on Pierre Berton’s book, see *Olympia Churchman*, June 1965, p. 7; *Canadian Churchman*, February 1965, p. 17, and April 1965, p. 14; *Presbyterian Record*, March 1965, pp. 2–3. For discussion on the “Death of God,” see *Presbyterian Record*, October 1966, p. 16; *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1966, pp. 12–13, 45; *Vancouver Sun*, February 5, 1966, p. 8; *Nanaimo Free Press*, February 4, 1966, p. 4; *National Catholic Reporter*, June 22, 1966, p. 2. For a secondary analysis on the “Death of God” controversy in Canada, see Stephen Morris, “Secularization in Canada in the 1960s: Mass Media and the ‘Problem of History’” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2005).

relative to the rest of North America remained stable through these years. Northwesterners were not uniformly secular, but they were consistently more apt to ignore, avoid, or reject religion than residents of other regions. This phenomenon draws attention to the relationship between religion and region, a relationship that is just beginning to be explored by historians. This study joins these nascent explorations and examines the mutual constitution of secularism and regionalism in British Columbia and Washington State between 1950 and the 1970s.⁴ It suggests that secularism was central to the invention of the Pacific Northwest as a distinctive, cross-border place. Secularism helped to define Northwest identity and was itself produced and entrenched by regional discourses.

Although it has been widely acknowledged, the secularity of the Pacific Northwest remains largely unexplained. Scholars have searched, in vain, for a demographic explanation for this regional phenomenon. As the authors of one recent study note, non-religious residents of the Pacific Northwest were, and are, by all accounts “demographically conventional.”⁵ Class, gender, and other categories shaped how people engaged in and disengaged from religion, but none of these categories accounts for the unique irreligion of the Northwest. This study suggests that Northwest secularism is best understood as a cultural, rather than demographic, phenomenon. By the postwar decades, irreligion had become an element of Northwest culture, cutting across social and geographical boundaries in the region. To reject or ignore religion, especially organized religion, had come to seem typical, even expected, of the Northwesterner. As scholars Patricia Killen and Mark Shibley observe, even today, “not to identify with established religion is an ordinary rather than a countercultural practice in the Northwest.”⁶ The ordinariness of irreligion in the Pacific Northwest was neither inevitable nor the product of a peculiar demography. Rather, irreligion was actively constructed as an element of Northwest identity, made a part of this cross-border culture in households, newspapers, and even churches across the region.

People define themselves and each other in relation not only to such categories as gender and class, but also to place. They create places but are also situated by them, often behaving in ways that are geographically specific. According to David Harvey, geography is the “neglected

4 Although the present article focuses on British Columbia and Washington State, it is worth noting that Oregon maintained similarly low levels of church involvement through the twentieth century. See, for example, Mark Shibley, “Religion in Oregon: Recent Demographic Currents in the Mainstream,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 83, no. 3 (July 1992), pp. 82–87.

5 Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark A. Shibley, “Surveying the Religious Landscape: Historical Trends and Current Patterns in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska” in Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), pp. 41–42.

6 *Ibid.*

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stepchild” of social theory. In much of North American historiography, place tends to be treated as the “stable context or site for historical action,” as a “container” for wider processes rather than something that is itself in need of explanation.⁷ Here, I treat the cross-border region of the Pacific Northwest not simply as a new geographic context for the study of religion. More than just a setting for broader processes, the Northwest is itself an actor in this narrative. People encounter religion from specific geographic as well as social locations, and this matters to religious behaviour and identity. In suggesting that place shaped human experience, this study recalls, but does not replicate, the thesis of Western exceptionalism. Proponents of Western exceptionalism have been widely criticized for arguing, without adequate comparative evidence, that there was something intrinsic in the North American West that produced a certain kind of people (labour radicals, in particular).⁸ This study departs from this essentialist premise by situating the Northwest in comparative context and, following the work of cultural geographers, conceptualizing place as constructed, shifting, and contingent, rather than stable or natural.⁹ Secularism did not somehow inhere within the land or people of the Pacific Northwest. However, as we shall see, by the postwar era secularism had become part of the regional imaginary,

7 David Harvey, as cited in David Livingstone, “Science and Religion: Foreword to the Historical Geography of an Encounter,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1994), p. 368; John Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 2. For several years, American scholars have debated whether the West should be considered a place, region, or process. See, for example, Kerwin Klein, “Reclaiming the ‘F’ Word, or Being and Becoming Postwestern,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 65, no. 2 (1996), pp. 179–215; Michael Steiner, “From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 64, no. 4 (1995), pp. 479–501; Michael Lansing, “Different Methods, Different Places: Feminist Geography and New Directions in U.S. Western History,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2003), p. 232; David Wrobel, “Beyond the Frontier-Region Dichotomy,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 65, no. 3 (1996), pp. 401–429.

8 For the classic statement of the thesis of Western exceptionalism in Canada, see David Bercuson, “Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1897–1919,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (1977), pp. 154–175. For discussions about the thesis, see Carlos Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885–1917* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979); Mark Leier, “W[h]ither Labour History: Regionalism, Class, and the Writing of BC History,” *BC Studies*, no. 111 (1996), pp. 61–75; John Douglas Belshaw, “The West We Have Lost: British Columbia’s Demographic Past and an Agenda for Population History,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 29 (Spring 1998), pp. 25–47.

9 See, in particular, Agnew, *Place and Politics*; John Agnew and Jonathan Smith, eds., *American Space/American Place: Geographies of the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991); Kate Berry and Martha Henderson, eds., *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002); Derek Gregory, Ron Martin, and Graham Smith, eds., *Human Geography: Society, Space, and Social Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

intertwined with class and gender in commonsensical understandings of the authentic Northwest.

While geography is often overlooked in North American historiography generally, this is especially the case in studies of religion. For example, in the rich literature on secularization in North America, the process of secularization often appears placeless, as a nationally uniform rather than regionally divergent phenomenon.¹⁰ While more attention has been given to the geographical dimensions of the sacred than the secular, scholars of religion often neglect to situate their subjects in place. The religion scholar Samuel Hill hints at the reasons for this: "It may be surprising to many that so apparently private, and perhaps culture-transcendent, an aspect of life is heavily influenced by where one lives, indeed the place to which one migrates."¹¹ As Hill implies, to suggest that where a person lives affects how, or indeed whether, he or she practises religion is to acknowledge that religious behaviour is shaped by the everyday. This contradicts the ingrained idea of religion as something "transcendent, not present in things," as something that is separate from culture, rather than made by, through, and within it.¹² Despite entrenched ideas about the universal, transcendent meanings of religion, decisions about the sacred, I argue, were often grounded in place.

This study seeks to illuminate the place-specific irreligion of the Pacific Northwest through an analysis of three sets of primary sources: printed materials, quantitative data, and oral interviews. I examined a wide range of newspapers, popular texts, archival sources, and church records for insights into the broader construction of Northwest secularism. In addition, I combed through quantitative records such as church membership studies and national surveys to trace regional patterns of religious involvement in Canada and the United States. Finally, I conducted oral

10 See, for example, Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

11 Samuel Hill, "Religion and Region in America," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 480 (1985), p. 140. For other studies that have sought to place religion, see, for example, Wilbur Zelinsky, "An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 51 (1961), pp. 139–193; James Shortridge, "A New Regionalization of American Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1977), pp. 143–153; Richard Wentz, "Region and Religion in America," *Foundations*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1981), pp. 148–156; Jerald Brauer, "Regionalism and Religion in America," *Church History*, vol. 54, no. 3 (1985), pp. 366–378; Belden Lane, "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space," *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 53–81; Rhys Williams, "Religion, Community, and Place: Locating the Transcendent," *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2002), pp. 249–263.

12 Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in David Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 6. See also Lane, "Giving Voice to Place," p. 58; Williams, "Religion, Community, and Place," pp. 260–261.

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interviews with 44 individuals who lived in British Columbia or Washington in the postwar decades. I focused my interviews on five cities: Vancouver and Nanaimo in British Columbia, and Seattle, Olympia, and Port Angeles in Washington.¹³ Narrators were located primarily through advertisements and word of mouth. To be selected for this study, individuals had to have reached the age of 18 by 1960 and to have lived in Washington State or British Columbia for all or part of the period 1950–1971. One or all of the following criteria had to apply: individuals who defined themselves as non-religious in the postwar years, did not attend or join a church or other religious organization during these decades, or left a church or other religious organization during this time. I spoke with people who called themselves unbelievers, but had been married in a church; people who prayed often but were against organized religion; and people who went to church to set an example for their children, but left once their children were grown. The interviews reinforced my awareness that the boundaries between sacred and secular are blurred in actual experience; people rarely fit comfortably into the neat categories set out for them, religious or otherwise.

I asked my informants open-ended questions pertaining to a range of subjects, including the role (if any) of religion in their family lives, their reasons for turning (or staying) away from organized religion, and their thoughts on the place of religion in the postwar Northwest.¹⁴ As with most oral history projects, questions arise as to whether or not the interviewees are representative. I interviewed an equal number of women and men and approximately the same number of working- and middle-class individuals. The majority of my informants were white and of European origin, mirroring the ethnic make-up of the region more generally; also, most had been raised by parents who adhered to Christianity, at least culturally. Most, then, approached religion from positions within the cultural mainstream.¹⁵ Of course, the 44 interviewees in this study cannot be said to

13 The names of all interviewees in this study have been changed.

14 For discussions on this “semi-structured” approach to interviewing, see H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*, 3rd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994); Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 18–23. For an evocative discussion on critical self-reflexivity in religious research, see Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially chap. 6.

15 For overviews of the racial and ethnic demography of British Columbia and Washington in the postwar decades, see Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, revised ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 305–316; Carlos Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, revised ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 450–451. Also see *Census of Canada*, vol. 1, Part 4, Bulletin 7, Table 19 (1971); United

represent a definite cross-section of even the white, Euro-Christian population in the Northwest. Of my 44 informants, 15 identified themselves as atheists, which is a far greater proportion than in the Pacific Northwest region as a whole. While approximately a third of my informants considered themselves to be spiritual, all shared a detachment from organized religion. This was a region of many religious voices, including those of evangelical Christians and others with deep ties to religious institutions. Although they were in the majority, “unchurched” or religiously uninvolved Northwesterners were not the sole determinants of this regional culture. The oral narratives, then, must be seen as representing a particular, and most certainly contested, perspective; they also must be approached not as unmediated reconstructions of the past, but rather as cultural constructions filtered through the present.¹⁶ For example, as we shall see, my informants reproduced shared essentialisms of the Northwest, describing it as an especially rugged, independent, and outdoor place. Rather than debating the truth of such assertions, I interrogate them for what they reveal about the taken-for-granted elements of this regional culture. The Northwest’s secular identity has been partly imagined into being through the stories that ordinary people tell and retell about the region.

While the oral interviews revealed the line between secular and sacred to be unstable rather than fixed, these conversations also compelled me to take irreligion seriously. In this study, religion is not equated with a single belief system, such as Christianity, nor is it taken to mean any world view, code of ethics, or system of meaning. Instead, the word is used to refer to beliefs, habits, symbols, and practices that people associated with the supernatural or divine or that, quite simply, they understood to be religious. I have deliberately kept the boundaries of religion open and fluid and have tried as much as possible to capture how ordinary people understood the sacred and secular. Like religion, the term secularism is in some ways a fiction that must be defined loosely so as not to obscure the complexity of human experience. Here, I use the term secularism flexibly (and interchangeably with other terms such as irreligion) to refer to behaviours, actions, and discourses that countered, in passive or active ways, specifically religious orderings. Conceptualized in this way, secularism includes, but does not equate to, atheism. This was not a region filled with outspoken atheists; it was, however, a place where irreligion, in its

States, Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population, Characteristics of Population, U.S. Summary*, vol. 1, Part 1, Section 1, Table 59 (1970), and *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington: United States Department of Commerce, 1975), Series A 23–28. In 1970, 95.4 per cent of Washington’s population identified themselves as white. The *Census of Canada* documents ethnic origins, but not racial identities; in 1971, 93 per cent of British Columbia residents claimed to be of British or European heritage.

16 Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, p. 19.

multiple and sometimes partial forms, was common. Scholars have begun the important work of studying the social experience of religion, attending even (and perhaps especially) to those ideas and practices typically excluded from conventional notions of true religion.¹⁷ Increasingly seen as active creators of rich religious cultures, ordinary people often disappear when the discussion turns to secularism. Secularism tends to be conceptualized as something that happens to actual people, rather than as something produced and articulated by them.¹⁸ Inspired by recent work in the study of lived religion, this study suggests that Northwest irreligion was made and sustained by the people who lived in this region. The study of lived religion, according to Robert Orsi, takes us away from formal doctrines and denominations and towards a focus on “how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in culture — *all* the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly their ‘own’.”¹⁹ In contributing to this redirection, I depart from the usual path of inquiry by focusing mainly on how and why people “lived against” religion. Postwar cultural observers (and some present-day scholars) have depicted Northwesterners as unwitting secularists, as a people inexorably drawn away from religion by external, often environmental, forces. As we shall see, the people themselves tell a different story in which they are agents (rather than passive observers) of secularism. Many residents of this region actively cast irreligion in positive terms and helped to make it a normative part of Northwest culture.

The Northwest was not universally secular, but residents of this region were (and are) far more likely than their counterparts elsewhere to ignore or reject religious institutions and religion itself. Interestingly, this region has also been characterized by religious innovation and a strong strand of evangelicalism. In the postwar decades, the religious demography of British Columbia and Washington reflected the national picture, with important exceptions. In 1971, the United and Roman Catholic Churches drew the largest number of adherents in both British Columbia and Canada; however, the United Church took the top spot in the province at 24.6 per cent of the population (compared to 17.5 per cent nationwide), whereas the Catholic Church drew the greatest share of the national population at 46.2 per cent (compared to 18.7 per cent

17 See, for example, Norman Knowles, “Christ in the Crowsnest: Religion and the Anglo-Protestant Working Class in the Crowsnest Pass, 1898–1918,” in Michael Behiels and Marcel Martel, eds., *Nations, Ideas, Identities: Essays in Honour of Ramsay Cook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*; David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

18 See Wilfred McClay, “Two Concepts of Secularism,” *Journal of Policy History*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2001), p. 58.

19 Orsi, “Everday Miracles,” p. 7.

in British Columbia).²⁰ Catholicism was the largest denomination in both Washington and the United States; however, Catholicism claimed 22 per cent of the national population, but fewer than 11 per cent of Washington residents.²¹ Since the Second World War, evangelical denominations such as Pentecostalism have been especially successful in the Pacific Northwest. Some scholars speculate that, in this relatively secular region, religious involvement is based far less on family tradition or social pressure than is the case in other places. Accordingly, those Northwesterners who do participate in religion tend to demonstrate a stronger, more active religious commitment than the “sturdy religious moderates” who predominate elsewhere.²² Despite their influence, evangelicals were and are very much a minority in the region.²³ While Northwest evangelicalism demands further study, the most distinctive aspect of this region’s religious culture was, and remains, its irreligion.

All available statistics show that British Columbians were more apt than other Canadians to stay away from churches and other religious institutions.²⁴ For instance, a Gallup poll reported in 1960 that only 30.1 per cent of people in British Columbia regularly attended religious institutions, compared to 79.6 per cent in Quebec, 58 per cent in the Atlantic region, 49.4 per cent in Ontario, and 44.7 per cent in the Prairie region.²⁵ A national survey indicated in 1977 that only 36.3 per cent of British Columbians were members of a religious group, compared

20 *Census of Canada*, Special Series #5, Table 1 (1971).

21 Douglas Johnson *et al.*, eds., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County, 1971* (Washington: Glenmary Research Center, 1974), Table 2.

22 Patricia O’Connell Killen, “Introduction: Patterns of the Past, Prospects for the Future: Religion in the None Zone,” in Killen and Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life*, p. 10; Bob Stewart, “That’s the B.C. Spirit! Religion and Secularity in Lotus Land,” *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (1983), p. 11.

23 For example, despite impressive growth in the postwar decades, by 1971 Pentecostalism still constituted only 1.6 per cent of the province’s population and less than 1 per cent of the Washington State population; see *Census of Canada*, Special Series #5, Table 1 (1971); Johnson *et al.*, eds., *Churches and Church Membership, 1971*, Table 2.

24 *Canadian Churchman*, November 6, 1952, p. 336; October 2, 1952, p. 299; October 1962, p. 9; June 1963, p. 8; *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1962, p. 8; United Church of Canada [hereafter UCC], Board of Evangelism and Social Service [hereafter BESS], *Annual Reports*, 1953, p. 81, and 1963, p. 149. Also see Robert Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917–1981* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), p. 5; Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishers, 1987), p. 89.

25 Hans Mol, “Major Correlates of Churchgoing in Canada” in Stewart Crysdale and Les Wheatcroft, eds., *Religion in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), pp. 241–242. For further reference to British Columbia’s uniquely low levels of church attendance, see Stewart, “That’s the B.C. Spirit!,” p. 23; Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, p. 89.

to 58.9 per cent of people nationwide.²⁶ Through these years, residents of British Columbia were also more likely to claim that they had no religion. According to the Canadian census, in 1951, 2.2 per cent of British Columbians claimed that they had no religion, as compared to 0.4 per cent of Canadians. In 1971, 13.1 per cent of British Columbians selected no religion on the census form, while only 4.3 per cent of Canadians did so.²⁷ Like their northern neighbours, residents of Washington were far less religiously involved than their counterparts across the United States. In several county-level studies conducted between the 1950s and the 1970s, Washington consistently ranked last among all states in total church membership. In 1971, the National Council of Churches undertook a survey of church membership in the United States; according to this study, Washington had a membership rate of 32.5 per cent as compared to 49.6 per cent nationwide.²⁸ A range of survey data confirms the regional patterns identified in these studies. National polls point to uniquely low

26 Data Laboratories Research Consultants [hereafter DLRC], *Report of a Survey of Canadians' Participation in Organized Religion* (Montreal: DLRC, 1977), pp. 9–13. See also Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, p. 89.

27 *Census of Canada*, vol. 10, Table 5 (1951) and vol. 5, Part 1, Table 5 (1971). "No religion" was not included as a category in the published 1961 *Census of Canada*. For further statistical examinations of regional patterns of irreligion in Canada, see Stewart, "That's the B.C. Spirit!," pp. 22–35; J. E. Veevers and D. F. Cousineau, "The Heathen Canadians: Demographic Correlates of Nonbelief," *Pacific Sociological Review*, vol. 23, no. 2 (April 1930), pp. 199–216; Lynne Marks, "Exploring Regional Diversity in Patterns of Religious Participation: Canada in 1901," *Historical Methods*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2000), pp. 247–254.

28 Johnson *et al.*, eds., *Churches and Church Membership, 1971*. A 1952 study reported similar findings; see National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America [hereafter NCCC], *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: An Enumeration and Analysis by Counties, States, and Regions*, serial A-E (New York: Bureau of Research and Surveys, 1956). Similar, county-level church membership studies were also conducted for the years 1980 and 1990; see Bernard Quinn *et al.*, eds., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County, Based on Data Reported by 111 Church Bodies* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 1982); Martin Bradley *et al.*, eds., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County, Based on Data Reported for 133 Church Groupings* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 1992). For a secondary discussion on these church membership studies, see J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977); William Newman and Peter Halvorson, "The Church Membership Studies: An Assessment of Four Decades of Institutional Research," *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 35, no. 1 (September 1993), pp. 55–61. For other local and county-level church membership studies, see University of Washington Special Collections [hereafter UWSC], Washington and Northern Idaho Council of Churches and Christian Education [hereafter WNICC], 1920–1966, Acc. 1567, Box 3, File 7, "What's On Your Mind?," Area Meeting, First Methodist Church, Yakima, Washington, March 31–April 1, 1952; Box 3, File 13, Report of a Survey conducted by the Sociology Department of Whitworth College, April 1956; Box 7, File 26, Report presented by Professor Arthur Frederick to a joint meeting of The Home Missions Council and the Department of Church Planning and Strategy of the Washington Council of Churches, December 1946; Box 12, File 6, An Address "To All Ministers in Tacoma, and Guests of the College of Puget Sound," November 2, 1954; UWSC,

levels of both church membership and attendance in the American West, especially the Pacific Northwest, through the postwar era.²⁹ While several surveys and studies clearly show the Northwest to be a most secular region in terms of organized religious involvement, such figures should not be seen as reliable measures of personal belief. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of data on regional patterns of religious belief in the postwar era. Several surveys suggest that there were fewer believers in the Northwest than in other regions, but the results are neither as consistent nor as conclusive as the results on institutional adherence. National surveys clearly show, however, that residents of British Columbia and Washington were less likely than their national counterparts to call themselves religious and less likely to see religion as a relevant part of their daily lives.³⁰

Gender, class, and ethnicity shaped encounters with (and disengagements from) religion in the Northwest, but such categories did not determine this region's secular culture. Here, as in other regions, women were more religious than men; however, Northwest women were much less likely to join churches and to claim a religious affiliation than their counterparts elsewhere. For instance, in 1971, both males and females in British Columbia were approximately three times more likely than Canadians in general to claim no religion. According to a series of national surveys conducted in 1970, women in the American Far West were twice as likely as their counterparts elsewhere to reject formal religion.³¹ Quantitative data and secondary research reveal similar findings for class and ethnicity. Although working-class Northwesterners were less religious than their middle-class counterparts, people across all income and occupational categories in this region were less religious than residents of other regions.³² Likewise, all ethnic and racial groups in the Northwest

Arthur Frederick and Ross Sanderson, "The Columbia Basin Project Area and its Churches," Washington State Council of Churches, 1950.

29 George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 1222, 1252, 1253, 1479, 1746, 1856, 1912, 2040, 2095, 2276; Martin E. Marty, Stuart E. Rosenberg, and Andrew M. Greeley, *What Do We Believe? The Stance of Religion in America* (New York: Meredith Press, 1968), pp. 276–277; Jackson Carroll, Douglas W. Johnson, and Martin E. Marty, *Religion in America: 1950 to the Present* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 21. Drawing on the available statistical data, several scholars have identified an "unchurched belt" along the west coast of Canada and the United States. See, for example, Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 137; Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 69–76.

30 In the Canadian context, see Stewart, "That's the B.C. Spirit!," p. 23; DLRC, *Report of a Survey*. In the American context, see Marty, *et al.*, *What Do We Believe?*, pp. 184–185.

31 *Gallup Opinion Index*, vol. 70 (April 1971), pp. 70–81.

32 See *Gallup Opinion Index*, vol. 44 (1969), p. 33; vol. 70 (April 1971), pp. 70–81; *Census of Canada* (1971), vol. 5, part 1, table 16, pp. 49–50, and table 14.

were proportionately less religious than such groups in other regions.³³ That Northwest irreligion was (and remains) a cultural rather than an exclusively demographic phenomenon is well established in the existing literature.³⁴ Scholars agree that the unique secularity of the Northwest cannot be explained by an unusual demography, nor isolated to a particular group or area in the region. We are left to consider what, in fact, produced and sustained this regional secularism. What did the schoolteacher in Bellingham, the pulp mill worker in Nanaimo, the businessperson in Vancouver, and the homemaker in Olympia have in common? Although subject to differing expectations of class, gender, and ethnicity, these people were loosely connected by place.

Place worked in local and regional ways to shape religious practice and identity in the postwar Pacific Northwest. According to geographer John Agnew, place “represents the encounter of people with other people and things in space. It refers to how everyday life is inscribed in space and takes on meaning for specified groups of people and organizations.”³⁵ Unlike much of the existing literature, which remains bounded by the nation-state, this study conceptualizes place in a cross-border way, suggesting that irreligion both nurtured and reflected place-specific identities in the postwar Northwest.³⁶ Literal and symbolic border crossings

33 For data in the United States, see Kevin William Welch, “Church Membership in American Metropolitan Areas, 1952–1971” (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1985), p. 26; Thomas Davenport, *Virtuous Pagans: Unreligious People in America* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1991), p. 79; *Gallup Opinion Index*, vol. 70 (April 1971), pp. 70–81.

34 See, for example, Stewart, “That’s the B.C. Spirit!,” pp. 22–35; Killen and Shibley, “Surveying the Religious Landscape,” pp. 41–42; Larry Hunt and Matthew Hunt, “Race, Religion, and Religious Involvement: A Comparative Study of Whites and African Americans,” *Social Forces*, vol. 80, no. 2 (December 2001), p. 621; Roger Stump, “Regional Migration and Religious Commitment in the U.S.,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1984), p. 293, and “Regional Divergence in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.,” *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 1984), pp. 283–299; Hill, “Religion and Region,” p. 139.

35 Agnew, “Introduction” in Agnew and Smith, eds., *American Space/ American Place*, p. 5. Also see Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), p. xiv; John Agnew and James Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Shields, *Places on the Margin*; Lee Cuba and David Hummon, “A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region,” *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993), p. 112.

36 For studies that cross the American-Canadian border, see, for example, Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992); Kenneth Coates and John Findlay, eds., *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Sheila McManus, *The Line which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbours: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*; Colin Howell, “Borderlands, Baselines, and Bearhunters: Conceptualizing the Northeast as a Sporting Region in the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 29, no. 2

nurtured the distinctive culture of the Pacific Northwest, including its irreligion. In 1952, an American Northwest Baptist paper commented on the BC Bible Conference: “the people seem little different in crossing the national boundary line. They are a vigorous, happy, outdoor, independent breed like all the people of the great Northwest.”³⁷ The easy movement of ideas across the line sometimes caused concern among church leaders. In 1954, the United Church introduced its new Social Service Secretary for Canada’s West Coast province: “With headquarters in Vancouver, he is responsible for British Columbia, so rapidly developing; and because it is so much shut off from the east that it is affected by American mores moving up the coast — mores not always the best for Canada.”³⁸ While British Columbia religious leaders occasionally bemoaned American influences, they also enjoyed strong connections with their counterparts south of the border. Organized secularism also crossed the national boundary. Secular Humanists in British Columbia and Washington met regularly for meetings and conferences. In 1964, the editors of the *Victoria Humanist* considered changing the name of the journal to better capture the transborder character of Northwest secularism. One woman offered her opinion on the proposed name change:

From my own experience of publishing, I would not worry about changing the title to embrace a wider field. Our friends across the line consider us as part of their Pacific Northwest cultural heritage. The name, “Victoria” is magnetic and there is no valid reason why we should not be originating ideas and clear thinking in print. If much of the industrial wealth is in the East, a great deal of real ability and drive is to be found on the Pacific Coast.³⁹

As this comment suggests, Northwesterners often found more common ground with their “friends across the line” than with their national counterparts to the east.

The porosity of the border between British Columbia and Washington has been widely acknowledged by scholars and cultural observers. Both regions have been bound by common economic interests, a shared commitment to environmentalism, and an historic tradition of labour radicalism. Migration rates between Washington and British Columbia were high through the postwar era, and some scholars have even argued that the province and state should form a separate nation called Cascadia or

(2002), pp. 250–270; Lauren McKinsey and Victor Konrad, *Borderlands Reflections: The United States and Canada* (Orono, ME: Borderlands Monograph Series, 1989).

37 *Western Regular Baptist*, February 15, 1952, p. 12.

38 UCC, BESS, *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 7.

39 *Victoria Humanist*, December 1964, p. 2.

Ecotopia.⁴⁰ Cultural media of the postwar decades, including fiction, histories, and travel books, often represented the Pacific Northwest as a cross-border region, inhabited by a similar type of people.⁴¹ Perhaps the most compelling reason to consider the Northwest a cross-border region is that the people who live there understand it as such. A Port Angeles woman echoed others in articulating a transborder sense of place:

You know, I think that actually this part of Washington and Canada should be one country, because we're a lot alike, a great deal alike. We can go way up in the woods, and it's people that we enjoy. But, say, if we head east, and we get to the Midwest or something, it's like we're from Mars. I think we're all the same people. It's just this piece of water out here, that's the only thing between us.⁴²

Although divided by a national border, Washingtonians and British Columbians often imagined themselves (and were imagined by others) as inhabiting a common place.

Place influences religious behaviour in very basic ways. While this has often escaped the notice of scholars, ordinary people readily offer geographical explanations for their religious or irreligious behaviour. When asked why she had never attended church, Donna explained, "Oh, I think a lot of the main reason is the circumstances of where we were — physically, we were out of town. We always seemed to live somewhere out of town. It was mostly, I think, probably the physical."⁴³ Another woman claimed that she had not christened her child, in part due to the geographical obstacles of living in the North: "they had a little ferry that went across the Klondike, and if the water was too high, you couldn't run the ferry... And it was the same thing in the spring, when the ice

40 Don Alper, "The Idea of Cascadia: Emergent Transborder Regionalism in the Pacific Northwest-Western Canada," *Journal of Borderland Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1996), pp. 1–22; Matthew Sparke, "Excavating the Future in Cascadia: Geoeconomies and the Imagined Geographies of a Cross-Border Region," *BC Studies*, vol. 127 (2000), pp. 5–44; Joachim Blatter, "From Spaces of Place to Spaces of Flows? Territorial and Functional Governance in Cross-Border Regions in Europe and North America," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2004), pp. 539, 545; Patrick Smith, "Cascading Concepts in Cascadia: A Territory or Notion?," *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 25 (2002), pp. 113–148; Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). An interdisciplinary Canadian-American Borderlands Project was initiated in the 1980s; this project began from the premise that "North America runs more naturally north and south than east and west." For a discussion of the project, see McKinsey and Konrad, *Borderlands Reflections*.

41 Stewart Holbrook, *Far Corner: A Personal View of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p. 48; Murray Morgan, *The Northwest Corner: The Pacific Northwest, its Past and Present* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), p. 7.

42 Susan Young, interview with author, October 30, 2003.

43 Donna Tremblay, interview with author, August 29 and November 19, 2003.

broke up. There were times you couldn't get across, you know. So, things like that, and time went by, and so we never had him christened."⁴⁴ Several of my informants admitted to selecting religious institutions for weddings, baptisms, and Sunday school based on proximity. Muriel, a homemaker in postwar Vancouver, reflected upon how she chose the setting for her wedding: "I happened to live in Kerrisdale at the time, and I walked by this church everyday, and I thought it looked like a real pretty English type church."⁴⁵ As these stories suggest, despite the conventional view of religion as somehow detached from ordinary life, decisions about religion were often tied to the everydayness of place.

Place worked not only in local but also in regional ways to shape religious practice and identity. My informants regularly called upon place to situate and explain the unimportance of organized religion in their lives. They widely affirmed that religious involvement was irrelevant to acceptance in the Northwest, regardless of social position. Longtime Olympia resident Richard Petersen noted that churchgoing "may have made a difference in some communities, but certainly not here."⁴⁶ In the 1960s, John left Ottawa for Nanaimo and was struck by the religious indifference of his new city. When asked whether religious affiliation was important to social life and status during that time, John replied, "In Ottawa yes, in Nanaimo not that I know of."⁴⁷ During the oral interviews, conversations about religion slipped easily into discussions about geography and place. Sharon Davis recalled her "amazement" at the lack of churchgoing in British Columbia, after moving to Victoria from Edmonton in the 1940s: "I was quite surprised when I got here, because people, where I had come from in Edmonton, the people that we knew were — other than my grandmother — most of them belonged to some religion, and went to church. So, when we came out here it was quite surprising that so many people didn't go to church."⁴⁸ Similarly, Seattle resident Charles Moore remarked, "I haven't really been cognizant of the church since we moved out here. Just never have been. But back East I was."⁴⁹ According to sociologist Rhys Williams, "everyday, lived religion — religion as the myriad cultural expressions of people as they move, grow, marry, die, and try to make sense of it all — depends crucially on place to constitute what it is."⁵⁰ Place constituted the meaning of religious practice for people like Sandra, who reflected upon her Montana childhood: "We didn't go to church, and I'm sure it cost us. We were weirdos in

44 Beverly and Bill Wilson, interview with author, September 4, 2003.

45 Muriel Thompson, interview with author, October 21, 2003.

46 Richard Peterson, interview with author, March 22, 2004.

47 John Hartwich, interview with author, September 8, 2003.

48 Sharon Davis, interview with author, September 22, 2003.

49 Charles Moore, interview with author, October 30, 2003.

50 Williams, "Religion, Community and Place," pp. 250–251.

Montana.” After moving to Seattle, Sandra discovered that non-attendance at church, while subversive in Montana, was normative in her new city: “there’s such a large number of people to whom [churchgoing] makes no difference. I never had any sense of that anyhow... I think it’s very easy to ignore religion living in Seattle.”⁵¹ The oral narratives suggest that many found it easy to ignore organized religion not only in Seattle, but also in Port Angeles, Nanaimo, and other towns and cities of the Northwest.

Places defy easy or singular definition; it is not possible to determine all that the Pacific Northwest meant to the people who lived there. While perceptions of place are necessarily partial, it is clear that irreligion was (and remains) an important strand in the crowded “world of meaning” that was the Pacific Northwest.⁵² According to Edward Ayers and Peter Onuf, people “carry in their heads quite powerful and uniform mental maps of the United States.”⁵³ Certainly, my interviewees carried powerful mental maps of religion in North America. When asked to consider the religious cultures of Canada and the United States, my informants typically responded in regional terms. For instance, Sharon replied, “Well, when you talk about the South, you hear so much about religion there.”⁵⁴ As the following comments indicate, several of my informants joined Sharon in easily reproducing the religious character of regions:

All I knew was that Quebec was very religious.

Canada is a little bit ahead of the United States. There’s no deep South in Canada.

I saw the South-East as heavily religious, and Utah as religious, California as not religious. There are pockets. The Midwest is more religious, but not so religious as the South-East.

Well, I could see Quebec being quite religious because there are so many Catholics there and they are so religious.

Oh, of course, we were well aware of the situation in the South, the bible belt.

51 Sandra Johnson, interview with author, March 27, 2004.

52 Katherine Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 16.

53 Edward Ayers and Peter Onuf, “Introduction” in Edward Ayers, Patricia Nelson, Stephen Nissenbaum, and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3.

54 Sharon Davis, interview with author, September 22, 2003.

The South was, you know, the hoot and holler religion.⁵⁵

As these remarks suggest, Quebec and the American South figured powerfully in the widely held, mental maps of North American religion. When asked whether her in-laws were religious, Donna replied, "I presume so, because they were in Quebec."⁵⁶ In addition to Quebec and the South, Utah, the Midwest, Alberta, and Atlantic Canada were considered especially religious. In 1968, a *Humanist* magazine matter-of-factly referred to Atlantic Canada as a region "where religion still holds the field."⁵⁷ My informants carried with them and readily reproduced taken-for-granted ideas about the religious character of regions. Most often, they assigned the Northwest a secular place in their "mental map" of North American religion. Even those who had rarely moved or travelled, such as Frank Williams of Seattle, "knew" their home to be a comparatively non-religious place. Frank distinguished his own region from "back East where religion is taken a bit more seriously."⁵⁸

The mental maps of North American religion were, in part, constituted historically. In 1860, a Protestant minister described his impressions of Olympia, Washington:

Infidelity and skepticism are not nourished in secret; intemperance does not fix the same blot upon the escutcheon of individual reputation as in the older settled portions of our country. Many of the population . . . seem to have forgotten the religious and moral restraints of early education and habit, and deem themselves emancipated from restraint and responsibility. . . . Many, also, are there who think less of God and the future than the excitements of money-making, the delirium of politics, or the delicious frenzy of intoxication.⁵⁹

As this comment suggests, perceptions of Northwest secularism did not suddenly appear in the 1950s, but had longstanding roots in the region. "Despite the current fashion to dismiss history as a force in everyday

55 Brian and Shirley Clark, interview with author, March 22, 2004; Sharon Davis, interview with author, September 22, 2003; Frank Williams, interview with author, March 28, 2004; Deborah and Steven Sanders, interview with author, March 29, 2004; Beverly and Bill Wilson, interview with author, September 4, 2003; Charles Moore, interview with author, October 30, 2003; Gary Nelson, interview with author, November 19, 2003; Karen Morrison, interview with author, November 19, 2003; Nancy MacEwan, interview with author, September 19, 2003; Thomas Brown, interview with author, November 11, 2003; William Harris, interview with author, March 23, 2004.

56 Donna Tremblay, interview with author, August 29 and November 19, 2003.

57 *Humanist in Canada*, Fall 1968, p. 24.

58 Frank Williams, interview with author, March 28, 2004.

59 UWSC, Thomas Jessett Papers, Acc. 1832, Box 9, File: Proposed Writing of History of Episcopal Church in Northwest, "The Episcopate of Thomas Fielding Scott," p. 13.

events,” writes Gerald Friesen, “Western Canadians respond to contemporary pressures in ways that are profoundly conditioned by the past.” The “habits of region,” he argues, “are sunk deep in the Canadian soil and psyche.”⁶⁰ Scholars have traced the Northwest’s distinct “habits” of secularism back to the nineteenth century. American researchers have shown that, in 1890, only 16.4 per cent of people in Washington State adhered to organized religion, as compared to 34.4 per cent in the United States as a whole.⁶¹ In the Canadian context, Lynne Marks has demonstrated that, in 1901, British Columbians were far less involved in churches and far more likely to be atheists than their counterparts in other provinces.⁶² The secularity of the Northwest following the Second World War must be considered part of a much longer history. Regional cultures are not stable essences, but rather human constructions that shift across time. Contingent on time as well as place, Northwest secularism was not the same in 1950 as it had been in 1900. In the earlier period, for example, this region’s unique irreligion partially stemmed from a demographic preponderance of young, single males.⁶³ While this gender imbalance had levelled out by the postwar era, the masculine connotations of the Northwest persisted through the 1970s and continued to influence this region’s secular identity. As this example suggests, historical forces shaped, but did not determine in any predictable way, the secularism of the postwar Northwest.

History worked on two levels to reproduce Northwest secularism: in ordinary households and in public constructions of this region’s past. According to historical geographer Kären Wigen, it is in the “local spaces of everyday life” that regional identities were produced and disseminated. The household, Wigen maintains, is an “essential ‘capillary’ of regional reproduction, the level at which distinctive patterns of speech, labor, and sociability have been both forged and lost.”⁶⁴ Although

60 Gerald Friesen, “Homer’s Odyssey and a Region of Rednecks: What Communication History Can Tell us About Canada as a Country of Region,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1–2 (2002), pp. 37, 39.

61 Killen and Shibley, “Surveying the Religious Landscape,” pp. 30–31; Thomas Jessett, “The Influence of the Church in Washington State: Is this God’s Country?” (typescript of speech delivered in Spokane, 1975), p. 5.

62 Lynne Marks, “Leaving God Behind When They Crossed the Rocky Mountains: Exploring Unbelief in Turn-of-the-Century British Columbia” in Peter Baskerville and Eric Sager, eds., *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 371–404, and “Exploring Regional Diversity.” S. D. Clark has also done important work on the historical entrenchment of irreligion in British Columbia; see, for example, *The Developing Canadian Community*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. 91–92.

63 See Marks, “Exploring Regional Diversity.”

64 Kären Wigen, “Culture, Power, and Place: The New Landscapes of East Asian Regionalism,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 4 (1999), pars. 35, 39, <http://historycooperative.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/journals/ahr/104.4>. See also Allan Pred, “Place as

understood and practised in different ways across the generations, religious traditions are often passed on within families. To take secularism seriously as an element of regional culture is to acknowledge that it, too, was entangled in family histories. This became evident in my interview with Karen, a retired nurse in Port Angeles, as she reflected on her mother's secular influence: "as far as religion was concerned, apparently she hadn't had any particular influence in her family, from her mother and father, and she didn't pass any on to us. And I'm grateful for that, because it gave me a chance to do my own thinking." Karen continued this secular tradition when she became a parent: "Religion was just never that big a deal, I guess, to us because we didn't really talk about it the way some people do, and we didn't say grace at dinner, and we didn't bless everybody."⁶⁵ The oral interviews suggest that non-religious Northwesterners constructed their secular identities in relation to family. Several of my informants, including Karen, attributed their secular inclinations at least partly to one or both of their parents. Out of the 44 individuals interviewed, more than half came from non-churchgoing families or families in which one or both parents were non-religious; approximately 16 of these were from families with deep roots in the Northwest. Sociologists have demonstrated that how or whether one encounters religion in his or her childhood home is an important predictor of future religious involvement.⁶⁶ Evidence from the oral testimonies suggests that irreligion was at least partly reproduced within Northwest families. William attributed his non-churchgoing, in part, to his upbringing in Thurston County:

I don't recall anybody in my family ever going to church. I don't recall my grandparents ever going to church, I don't recall my mother or father, or even my stepfather going to church. So, as far as I know, nobody in my family ever went to church. As far as I can recall. I mean, I know that I never went to church with my parents. I went to church one time with my uncle, and that was to a Catholic Church, one time, just because we were staying with him. But, none of my family went to church.⁶⁷

Nanaimo resident Donald Stewart recalled that, in opting for atheism, he had not consciously set out to "follow his dad," but had been deeply

Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 74, no. 2 (1984), pp. 280, 297.

⁶⁵ Karen Morrison, interview with author, November 19, 2003.

⁶⁶ Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, pp. 236–237; Everett Perry *et al.*, "Toward a Typology of Unchurched Protestants," *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 21 (1980), pp. 388–404.

⁶⁷ William Harris, interview with author, March 23, 2004.

influenced by his father's religious scepticism.⁶⁸ Although more elusive than religious rituals, regional patterns of secularism were reproduced, historically, within ordinary households, in actions taken and not taken in those "local spaces of everyday life" such as the dinner table.

This regional secularism was reproduced in public as well as private histories. Religion rarely appears in the dominant tellings of Pacific Northwest history. Popular and academic histories of the region that emerged in the postwar era typically ignored religion completely, except in relation to nineteenth-century Christian mission work, or stressed the secular character of the region.⁶⁹ For example, in 1957 the *Nanaimo Free Press* included an extensive supplement on the history of this city that included references to industry, leisure, and transportation, but not religion; likewise, Washington State's centennial celebrations in 1989 contained no mention of religion.⁷⁰ Cultural media not only circulated but also established this region's secular past. Popular histories disseminated the idea of Northwest secularism, helping to ingrain it in the public historical memory and, as we shall see, in the minds of ordinary people. As one regional writer affirmed, in the Northwest "there are not even strong ties with the tradition of religion."⁷¹ Social commentators in earlier years and today have reinforced this region's secularism by depicting it as a place with a "pioneer, honky-tonk history" that was "free of religious constraints."⁷² The Pacific Northwest's regional and secular identity became entwined, in part, through popular and also academic historical representations. In overlooking religion, such representations described, but also helped to make and perpetuate, this comparatively secular place. Historian Laurie Maffly-Kipp rightly notes that "religion as a social presence is either absent or at best, serves as a minor and ineffectual player" in popular and academic histories of the American West.⁷³ Maffly-Kipp, like

68 Jean and Donald Stewart, interview with author, June 23, 2003.

69 For early works that largely overlooked religion, see Dorothy Johansen and Charles Gates, *Empire of Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: Diocese of Olympia Press, 1967); Holbrook, *Far Corner*; Stewart Holbrook et al., *The Pacific Northwest* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1963); Ken Liddell, *This is British Columbia* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1958). For more recent discussions on the neglect of religion in studies of the Northwest's past, see Norman Knowles, "New Perspectives on the History of Religion in BC," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1996), p. 6; Ferenc Szasz, "The Clergy and the Myth of the American West," *Church History*, vol. 59, no. 4 (1990), pp. 497–500.

70 *Nanaimo Free Press*, October 31, 1957, p. 2; *Seattle Times*, October 21, 1989, p. A15.

71 Charles Booth, *The Northwestern United States* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), p. v.

72 *UW Daily*, October 19, 1979, p. 9; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 18, 1992, p. A6; *Seattle Times*, August 20, 1988, p. A14.

73 Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Historicizing Religion in the American West" in Peter Williams, ed., *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 11. Also see Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim" in Thomas Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California

many scholars, counters this absence by pointing to the “religious ferment” in this region’s history. Intent on showing religion’s presence, such scholars rarely acknowledge that secularism was itself an important aspect of Northwest regionalism.

The Northwest was more secular than other places in part because it was imagined that way. In arguing that Northwest secularism was culturally constructed, my work counters some of the more deterministic explanations for this regional phenomenon. Patricia Killen attributes irreligion in the American Northwest partly to the region’s geography and sparse population; the “sheer space” of the Northwest, she contends, has contributed “to the dynamic of the region leaching religiousness out of people.”⁷⁴ Killen aptly suggests that geographic elements mattered to Northwest irreligion, but she is less attentive to the cultural, place-specific meanings of these elements. Geographic factors function and are interpreted differently across various contexts — such factors do not by themselves inexorably “leach religiousness out of people.” Postwar religious and cultural observers often believed otherwise. As one American Episcopalian minister affirmed, the Northwest’s “natural world dominates its reality,” which makes “the work of a priest more difficult because the church’s traditional forms are not as readily accessible as, say, a mountain landscape.”⁷⁵ An American Methodist leader observed, “We once called the Pacific Northwest country, ‘God’s great out-of-doors,’ but now it’s all too often a refuge or escape to all those who want to get away from hearing what the God of the ‘great outdoors’ has to say to man.”⁷⁶ Canadian religious leaders also regularly blamed the mountains for drawing British Columbians away from the church and for acting as not only a geographical but a spiritual barrier. One United Church leader anticipated that British Columbians would become more religious when the mountains became more passable: “the new highways through the mountains will make a difference, and B.C. people will be more in touch with Alberta.”⁷⁷

Northwest secularism was often believed to be dictated by its physical geography. While place can shape religious practice in very basic ways, it must be understood in both material and symbolic terms. Mountain ranges, forests, and other physical features did not, on their own, determine

Press, 1997), p. 130; Szasz, “The Clergy,” p. 500; Patricia O’Connell Killen, “Writing the Pacific Northwest into Canadian and U.S. Catholic History: Geography, Demographics, and Regional Religion,” *Historical Studies: Canadian Catholic Historical Association*, vol. 66 (2000), pp. 75–76.

74 Killen, “Writing the Pacific Northwest,” p. 85.

75 Ron Strickland, ed., *Whistlepunks and Geoducks: Oral Histories from the Pacific Northwest* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001), p. 295. Also see *Lutheran*, March 26, 1952, pp. 12–15.

76 Methodist Church in the United States, Pacific Northwest Conference, *Annual Journal*, 1965, p. 92. Also see *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 2, 1977, pp. A1, A16.

77 *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1963, pp. 11, 46.

religious choices. As regional comparisons make clear, attention to cultural context is crucial. In Canada, an Anglican official matter-of-factly observed that the “Church’s hold is always precarious” in northern British Columbia because this “rough country” entails “dangerous journeys along a treacherous coast and arduous trips into a forbidding interior.”⁷⁸ Tellingly, on the opposite coast, a “treacherous” geography was deemed responsible for inspiring deep attachments to religion and the churches:

The Church occupies an important place in the life of the people of Newfoundland. It might be that because the people have been so closely related to the sea with its constant reminder of the power of God and with its heavy toll in human life, they seem to be more God conscious than people in inland areas. One of the results has been that Newfoundland has produced more ministers for the Christian Church in proportion to its population than any other area in Canada.⁷⁹

This example shows that seemingly objective geographical characteristics could be considered inherently secularizing in one context and sacralizing in another. As scholar Thomas Tweed aptly notes, “mountains and rivers — components of the so-called natural landscape — are culturally constructed and socially contested spaces.”⁸⁰ Geography, then, does not determine culture, but rather is mediated by it. In the postwar imaginary, Northwest geography was often (though not always) cast as secularizing.

In the regional vernacular, the mountains, trees, and sea were understood to be at least partly responsible for making organized religion irrelevant to the quintessential Northwest lifestyle. Historian Carlos Schwantes observes, “Rugged mountains and gargantuan trees called forth strong-willed, self-reliant individuals to match them, or so Northwesterners have often claimed.”⁸¹ Along with religious and cultural commentators, ordinary people often defined the Northwest’s geography as fundamentally antithetical to institutional religion. Although there was nothing inherent in this region’s landscape that made people less “churchy,” non-religious people themselves indicated otherwise. They regularly looked to the landscape to explain the absence of organized religion

78 Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1959, p. 381.

79 *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1951, p. 13.

80 Thomas Tweed, “Introduction: Narrating US Religious History” in Thomas Tweed, ed., *Retelling US Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 12. For further discussion on the religious meanings invested in western landscapes, see Sandra Frankiel, *California’s Spiritual Frontiers: Religious Alternatives in Anglo-Protestantism, 1850–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 15–16.

81 Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, p. 7; also see Norman Clark, Richard Etulain, Otis A. Pease, and Raymond D. Gastil, “A Symposium: The Pacific Northwest as Cultural Region,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 4 (1973), pp. 156–157.

in their own lives. James stayed away from churches through much of his life: “BC is an outdoor type of place. On a Sunday I would just get in my car and drive down to Seattle or drive down to Whistler, and enjoy nature. More preferable than sitting for an hour in church. That didn’t turn me on at all. I think people in BC have literally been drawn away from the church because we have other activities.”⁸² Port Angeles resident Susan Young similarly made sense of her decision to stay away from church in geographical terms: “the area that we live in, we can go miles in any direction, and we have a cathedral anywhere we want to turn.”⁸³ According to another narrator, the church was irrelevant in Nanaimo because of “the absorbance of [pause] I’d call it nature, I don’t know what else to call it.”⁸⁴ Several informants attributed their rejection of the church to the Northwest’s favourable climate; one British Columbia man, discussing his life outside the church, simply affirmed: “we’re living in Eden!”⁸⁵

The Northwest’s distinct irreligion was not intrinsic to its natural environment, but it was partly a product of how that environment was defined. To recognize that regional identity is constructed is not to deny its relevance to human behaviour. Most scholars have moved beyond the debate about whether human experience should be interpreted in exclusively materialist or discursive terms. The material and discursive realms are mutually constituted — everyday practices and circumstances give rise to shared cultural ideas and expectations, and such ideas and expectations frame, reshape, and occasionally delimit individual thoughts and actions.⁸⁶ The secular Northwest was simultaneously made (and contested) in material, everyday practice and on imaginative terrain. As American historian Patricia Limerick argues, because “of an idea of the South and of Southernness, people have submitted to federal authority and resisted federal authority; they have stayed home and moved away; they have stood in solidarity and stood in one another’s way; they have

82 James Anderson, interview with author, October 22, 2003. In the postwar decades, church leaders also often constructed the Pacific Northwest as a place of leisure. In 1967, the Washington and Northern Idaho Council of Churches began studying the possibilities of bringing the church to the people in parks and other leisure areas. See Methodist Church in the United States, Pacific Northwest Conference, *Annual Journal*, 1967, p. 164 and 1971, p. 122.

83 Susan Young, interview with author, October 30, 2003. Also see Frederick Lindsay, *Cariboo Years* (Quesnel, BC, 1962), p. 3.

84 Donna Tremblay, interview with author, August 29 and November 19, 2003.

85 Robert Taylor, interview with author, October 17, 2003; Margaret Ferguson, interview with author, September 10, 2003; Susan Young, interview with author, October 30, 2003; Jean and Donald Stewart, interview with author, June 23, 2003; Sandra Johnson, interview with author, March 27, 2004; Anne Carlson, interview with author, September 16, 2003.

86 Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, “The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Study: An Introduction,” in Chris Wilson and Paul Groth, eds., *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 15.

killed and been killed. Region is a mental act and region is real, at one and the same time.”⁸⁷ Because of an idea of the Pacific Northwest, people approached religion in particular ways. Northwesterners imagined themselves (and were perceived by others) as outdoorsy people who opted for nature over churches, and as a result many did so. My informants did not have religion “leached” out of them by their physical surroundings, but they did help to construct the Northwest’s mountains, forests, and waters in opposition to organized religion. In the regional imaginary, such geographic elements — considered religiously inspiring in certain contexts — rendered religious institutions irrelevant and occasionally supplanted the sacred altogether.

Secularism was construed as inherent not only to the Northwest’s landscape, but to its people. Both those within and outside the region helped to make and entrench dominant images of Northwesterners as a particular kind of people: independent, individualistic, and frontier-minded. Cultural leaders and ordinary people shared in essentializing “the Northwesterner [as] sort of a solo, individual person.”⁸⁸ Although it drew on wider Western myths, the discourse on Northwest individualism and independence was regionally specific. Postwar cultural observers within the region often insisted on differentiating the Pacific Northwest from other parts of the West. As writer Stewart Holbrook observed in 1952, “*This* Northwest is the one where men have their faces to the sea, and can go no farther. It’s time Minnesotans gave up calling their state the Northwest.” Holbrook went on: “one of the Northwest’s charms is this feeling of being tucked away in a forgotten far corner of the United States. . . . The sense of isolation also contributes to the restless pioneering spirit, the opening-up-of-the-country idea.”⁸⁹ In 1963, Roderick Haig-Brown remarked that British Columbia “is Canadian, but it is also West Coast Canadian, never quite forgetful of the mountains that divide.”⁹⁰ Postwar religious leaders similarly imagined the Pacific Northwest as a sort of “West beyond the West.”⁹¹ In 1967, an Anglican minister identified

87 Patricia Limerick, “Region and Reason” in Ayers *et al.*, eds., *All Over the Map*, p. 103.

88 Strickland, *Whistlepunks and Geoducks*, p. 295. For a discussion on the frontier myth in Canada and the United States, see Carlos Schwantes, “The Case of the Missing Century, or Where Did the American West Go after 1900?,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 70, no. 1 (2001), p. 2; Philip Resnick, *The Politics of Resentment: British Columbia Regionalism and Canadian Unity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), p. 19; Ian McKay, “A Note on ‘Region’ in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2000), p. 92; Gerald Friesen, “The Evolving Meanings of Region in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 82, no. 3 (September 2001), p. 535; Robert Ficken and Charles LeWarne, *Washington: A Centennial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 185.

89 Holbrook, *Far Corner*, pp. 4, 6.

90 Holbrook, *The Pacific Northwest*, p. 176.

91 Barman, *The West Beyond the West*. Also see Holbrook, who describes Northwesterners as a distinct type of people and identifies “degrees of West among Westerners” (*The Pacific Northwest*, p. 11).

“exclusiveness” as the chief characteristic of British Columbia; south of the border, a Washington minister observed that most “folks on the East Coast don’t know Seattle is even out there. They are unconscious of the Northwest, and that gives Seattleites a kind of freedom.”⁹²

Secularism was regularly associated with regional myths of individualism and independence in the Northwest. In a postwar report, the Washington State Council of Churches noted that the “rugged, frontier individualism of early days persists in the Northwest and has affected, probably adversely, the strength of the Church.”⁹³ In the oral narratives, irreligion joined independence as an intrinsic quality of the true Northwesterner; my informants described their own secularism as part of a shared regional sensibility. Richard noted that secularism “comes out of our pioneering experience. . . . We were widely separated — we had time to think. We had to be self-reliant. We didn’t have anybody bailing us out.”⁹⁴ Non-religious Northwesterners regularly called upon history to explain this region’s secularism as well as their own. As Joanne affirmed, “the people that founded Washington State were generally more independent . . . you know, the ones that headed west when this was really the frontier, you know. That independence lives on . . . people rebelling in terms of the union, and rebelling in terms of the status quo of religion. They were the explorers.”⁹⁵ Donald also interlinked this region’s frontier and secular identity:

We are less religious because we had to stand on our own two feet from the beginning. My grandmother came from Ohio, and her husband came from Ontario, and they were pioneers in the Okanagan, there was no welfare, there was no handouts from the government, there was nothing, they had to do their own thing. Everybody who came to BC had to do their own thing. That idea of being independent stuck, I think.⁹⁶

Irreligion gave meaning to, and was itself a product of, regionally specific senses of self. For many of my informants, religious detachment was an expression of regional identity, a characteristic that differentiated them from people in other places. Susan echoed others in describing Northwesterners as an independent people, religiously and otherwise; people from the East coast, she remarked, “don’t know how to plant a seed or mow a lawn. They don’t know how to start a fire. They’re really

92 Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1967, p. 10; Strickland, *Whistlepunks and Geoducks*, p. 291.

93 UWSC, WNICC, Acc. 1567–2, Box 3, File: Writings, “The State of the Church in the Northwest,” n.d.

94 Richard Peterson, interview with author, March 22, 2004.

95 Joanne Smith, interview with author, March 30, 2004.

96 Jean and Donald Stewart, interview with author, June 23, 2003.

helpless.”⁹⁷ Reproduced by cultural leaders and ordinary people, the myth of the true Northwesterner was a fiction with empirical consequences, particularly in the religious realm.⁹⁸ As the oral interviews indicate, non-religious Northwesterners knew this “far corner” to be an outdoor, independent, and secular place. Although invariably partial and most certainly contested, such regional myths helped to establish the ordinariness of irreligion in the Northwest.

In much of the existing literature on religion in the Pacific Northwest, religiosity is approached as normative. For instance, in his seminal work, geographer Wilbur Zelinsky contends that the American West “has substantial numbers of members in almost all the denominational groups, but is not the major centre for any.” He concludes by characterizing the West as the region with the “least recognizable religious personality.”⁹⁹ In Zelinsky’s study, as in many others, secularism appears as a lacuna rather than as an element of regional culture in its own right. Scholars have often interpreted secularism as a product of the Northwest’s particular geography, rather than as a creation of actual people who lived in this region. Places significantly shape behaviour, but are themselves products of the human imagination. The oral interviews suggest that non-religious people themselves helped to bring Northwest secularism into being. Ordinary people shared with church officials and other cultural observers in ascribing an irreverent quality to the region. However, unlike most religious and scholarly observers, non-religious residents often cast secularism as a positive element of Northwest culture. For instance, Nanaimo resident Edward Lewis asserted that to label British Columbia non-religious was an “accolade” that showed his province to be “a bit more laid back.”¹⁰⁰ For David, the relative lack of organized religion in Washington was evidence that “the farther west you went, the seemingly more understanding, or less critical [people] would be.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, in 1952 Northwest author Stewart Holbrook described Oregon’s secularity as a source of pride rather than shame: “Any place where Billy Sunday could not draw a full house,” he wrote, “must be more civilized than most.”¹⁰²

Religion, secularism, and the Northwest itself meant different things to different people, depending on their social identity. To acknowledge such variances does not erase the significance of place, but rather draws attention to its contingent, contested character. In the postwar Northwest, gender and class were especially significant to the creation of a distinctive

97 Susan Young, interview with author, October 30, 2003.

98 See Shields, *Places on the Margin*, pp. 6, 199.

99 Zelinsky, “An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States,” p. 164.

100 Edward Lewis, interview with author, August 26, 2003.

101 David Becker, interview with author, March 24, 2004.

102 Holbrook, *Far Corner*, p. 10.

secularism. Cultural and academic observers have widely acknowledged the masculine, working-class connotations of British Columbia and Washington State. For example, historian Laurie Mercier notes that, when she informs her students in Washington that “more communications workers than loggers have lost jobs in recent decades, they argue that loggers and their communities deserve special assistance because, unlike other workers, they represent ‘a way of life’ symbolic of the rugged Northwest.”¹⁰³ Mercier’s telling observation suggests the extent to which the (male) resource frontier has come to represent the authentic Pacific Northwest. My research indicates that the Northwest’s gender and class identity has worked to reinforce and perpetuate, rather than challenge, its secular identity.

In the postwar era, as in earlier times, cultural commentators rendered the Northwest masculine, highlighting the tough and rugged character of this region’s geography and its inhabitants. British Columbia, remarked an Anglican minister in 1961, “is a land that does not tolerate weaklings.”¹⁰⁴ While church leaders were among those who helped to masculinize the Northwest, they were also acutely aware that Christianity was an especially hard sell in this manly region. Through the postwar decades, religious officials regularly bemoaned the feminine connotations of Christianity. The *Canadian Churchman* complained that men “consciously or unconsciously think that the Christian faith is for sissies and old ladies,” while the *Presbyterian Record* reluctantly acknowledged that “the church presents a female image in the average Canadian’s mind.”¹⁰⁵ In an effort to counter this feminization, Northwest ministers anxiously represented Christianity as a faith well fitted to the rough, manly frontier. They reproduced narratives of a frontier past in which preachers were just as “robust” and “rugged” as other manly pioneers.¹⁰⁶ In 1962, the Greater Seattle Council of Churches printed the following profile of a Northwest Methodist lay leader: “If he had been born in another era, it would be easy to picture him on horseback, with a rifle in one hand, a Bible in the other ... and his eyes on the far horizon.”¹⁰⁷ Another narrative,

103 Laurie Mercier, “Reworking Race, Class, and Gender into Pacific Northwest History,” *Frontiers*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2001), p. 61. Also see Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, p. 364; William Lang, “Beavers, Fur, Salmon and Falling Water: Pacific Northwest Regionalism and the Environment,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 2 (Summer 2002), Par. 15; Holbrook, *Far Corner*, p. 233; Ruth Sandwell, “Peasants on the Coast? A Problematique of Rural British Columbia,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, vol. 10 (1996), p. 275; Eric Ewert, “The Case for Place: 80 Years of Demographic and Economic Change in the Boom and Bust Pacific Northwest” (PhD dissertation, University of Idaho, 2003), p. 54.

104 *Canadian Churchman*, January 1961, p. 16.

105 *Canadian Churchman*, May 1960, p. 4; *Presbyterian Record*, April 1966, p. 20; May 1957, p. 8.

106 *Western Lutheran*, September 27, 1954, p. 1; *Daily Christian Advocate*, April 25, 1956, p. 16.

107 UWSC, Greater Seattle Council of Churches Records [hereafter GSCC], Acc. 1358–7, Box 3, File 12: Notebooks, “So That You May Know,” December 11, 1962.

penned by an American Presbyterian minister, described the missionary work of “husky, two-fisted Frank Higgins. . . . Higgins preached his first sermon to the lumberjacks in 1895. Much to his surprise, they who seemed to be so profane and godless welcomed his preaching.”¹⁰⁸ Masculine metaphors also figured centrally in a Christian frontier story that appeared in a 1954 edition of the *Canadian Churchman*. The story related the “Christian adventure” of Father Pat, an Anglican missionary in British Columbia who, while on his way to visit an ailing prospector, encountered an angry group of miners who would not let him pass: “Quicker than lightning, he jerked one of the miners off his horse, struck a blow at another, and having cleared the trail, drove quickly on his errand.”¹⁰⁹ This story invested the Christian missionary with the rugged individualism and strength typical of more common frontier heroes such as the “virile sheriff” or “itinerant gunslinger.”¹¹⁰ In redefining mission work as manly, this narrative and others like it sought to resolve the gender tensions inherent in, and generated by, Christianity’s (tenuous) place in the frontier Northwest.

Christian leaders agonized not only over the gender, but the class appeal of their faith. They complained that their congregations were becoming “clubby chubby collection[s] of respectable people” and worried that workers were effectively “lost to organized Christianity.”¹¹¹ For ministers in the Northwest, the working-class, masculine character of their region made the middle-class, feminine character of the church both more obvious and more problematic. In 1966, a United Church student minister reflected on his encounter with lumber workers and construction crews in British Columbia: “The role of the minister . . . has to be reinterpreted to suit the area. It is a typical attitude of the men on this field that the ministry is made up of human beings who belong to a different sex — half way between man and weakling. This criticism is aimed at anyone who studies — teachers, doctors, and ministers alike.”¹¹² On both sides of the border, ministers felt compelled to reinvent themselves and their profession to find acceptance within the Northwest’s masculine, working-class culture. According to anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss, British Columbia’s

108 Clifford Merrill Drury, *Presbyterian Panorama: 150 Years of National Missions History* (Philadelphia: Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1952), p. 248.

109 *Canadian Churchman*, June 17, 1954, p. 184.

110 Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth as a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), p. 78; Maffly-Kipp, “Historicizing Religion,” p. 11.

111 *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1952, p. 18; UCC, BESS, *Annual Report*, 1955, p. 28; *Presbyterian Record*, September 1966, p. 3; *Christianity Today*, August 27, 1965, p. 14; *Christianity and Crisis*, March 2, 1959, p. 21.

112 UCC, *Outreach*, 1966, pp. 85–86.

regional, frontier identity has been characterized by “anti-intellectualism, the value of manual over mental labour, and the general suspicion of and hostility toward academics, bureaucrats, and professionals.”¹¹³ Sensing that they, too, engendered suspicion and hostility in the frontier Northwest, ministers, missionaries, and church workers set out to redefine themselves and their work as rough, manly, and adventurous.¹¹⁴ This masculine re-imagining is evident in a 1968 *United Church Observer* article titled “A Man’s Man in a Man’s Town.” The article reflected upon the work of one United Church reverend in the community of Terrace, BC: “When he sees a job to be done, he does it — like pounding a hammer, or driving a bulldozer, or becoming a minister.”¹¹⁵ By aligning spiritual with manual labour, this author assured his readers that the work of the minister was manly, working class, and truly Northwestern.

Despite the efforts of church leaders, the manly, working-class Northwest remained far more associated with secularism than Christianity through the postwar years. Class and gender, then, were central to the making of this secular place. According to geographer Rob Shields, “[A] spatial problematic does not displace problematics of class, gender, or ethnicity. Rather, it relativizes most of the sweeping generalisations which have been extracted from limited case studies and reintroduces us to the complexities of the interplay between the different facets of social life.”¹¹⁶ As Shields suggests, place is not a meta-category; it gives meaning to and is itself differentiated by class, gender, and other categories. Scholars intent on finding a demographic answer to the question of Northwest secularism have overlooked the ways in which class and gender have, in a cultural sense, reinforced this secularism. As we have seen, class, gender, and religion intertwined to nurture a distinctive, cross-border regional identity in the Pacific Northwest. Of course, regional identities are not universal and homogeneous, but rather fragmented, amorphous, and conflicted. To acknowledge that male resource workers were central to dominant and everyday visions of the true Northwest is not to deny the existence of alternative visions; likewise, to recognize secularism as a key element of Northwest culture is not to negate the abundant spiritual energies in the region. Indeed, the Northwest may have looked quite different through the lens of this region’s evangelical constituents.

113 Furniss, *The Burden of History*, p. 84. The oral narratives confirm Furniss’s argument; for instance, one of my Nanaimo informants admitted that, because working-class lifestyles were so valorized and normative in the region, he had always felt uncomfortable admitting that he had attended university.

114 For a discussion of how church leaders in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Alberta masculinized their work and message in an effort to appeal to miners and loggers in the Crowsnest region, see Knowles, “Christ in the Crowsnest,” p. 64.

115 *United Church Observer*, November 15, 1968, pp. 16–18.

116 Shields, *Places on the Margin*, p. 10.

From the perspective of the religiously uninvolved majority, however, “living against” religion had come, by the postwar years, to seem a natural, even inevitable, part of Northwest life.

In a recent article, Mark Silk notes that scholars who explore the intersections between region and religion are “in the business of opening conversations that have barely existed, rather than of having the last word.”¹¹⁷ As part of these emergent conversations, this study uses religion as a new and revealing lens on the creation — and continual re-creation — of the cross-border, regional culture of the Pacific Northwest. In the postwar years, as in other eras, Northwesterners were often described as a people who had “left God on the other side of the mountains.”¹¹⁸ Scholars and cultural observers regularly dismiss this claim, focusing their attentions instead on the rich spiritual culture of the region. This important work should continue, as much remains to be discovered about the nature of popular religious life in the Northwest. However, the secular impulses evident in the region have been too easily dismissed or ignored. My research suggests that secularism was a significant, though contested and unstable, strand in Northwest culture. It was part of a cross-border regional imaginary, intersecting with class and gender in ongoing constructions of the authentic Northwest. The geographical perspective taken here demonstrates that choices about religion were tied to the everydayness of place. In other words, being “on the other side of the mountains” did, indeed, matter to religious meaning and behaviour. This is not to deny moments of transcendence in the Pacific Northwest; rather, it is to affirm that people perceived and negotiated such moments in relation to their everyday social, cultural, and geographical worlds.

117 Mark Silk, “Religion and Region in American Public Life,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2005), p. 266.

118 *Western Regular Baptist*, March 1954, p. 11.